

CAN WE HEAR THE VOICE OF THE SECOND SEX IN THE TURKISH  
TRANSLATIONS OF *LE DEUXIEME SEXE*?

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## *Summary*

This study examines Turkish translations of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe* in terms of sexual terms and references to sexuality, compare them to the source text, comment on the effect the translations create in Turkish, and speculate on possible explanations for the changes, from a critical discourse analysis perspective. Another section of the study is on the analysis of paratextual features of all Turkish translations of Beauvoir's books.

The problems in the translation of sexual terms and references are raised by issues of "cultural sensitivity" and of "gender stereotyping and cliché", which are reinforced by the fact that Beauvoir's translators were almost all men (von Flotow 2000: 31). In that sense, the discourse analysis, and the contextualization of the translations and paratextual features with the aim to find answers to "who, what, when, how, why" questions will offer clues about the ideological stance towards "woman" and "woman writing" in the receiving cultural climate at a specific moment.

**Keywords:** female voice, feminist approach to translation, Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, paratext, discourse analysis.

## *Research Problem*

The “cultural turn” that translation studies underwent in the 1980s allowed the discipline to expand its boundaries and to bring together work from different fields such as linguistics, literary study, history, anthropology, psychology and economics (Bassnett 1995: ix). This new approach to translation from a cultural point of view led to the designation of translation as a form of “rewriting” which would inevitably reflect a certain ideology (ibid: ix). The interest in cultural differences, identity issues (including gender), power differentials and ideology led some groups of scholars to approach translation from a gender-studies perspective (Munday 2001: 127-133). Since language constructs meaning rather than reflecting the reality, translation which is an interlinguistic transfer of meaning cannot be expected to simply mirror the meaning of the original text which would be inevitably “rewritten” and manipulated by cultural mediators.

The combination of gender and translation continues to be a fruitful area of research dealing with a large range of areas such as historical studies, theoretical considerations, issues of identity and more general questions of cultural transfer (von Flotow 2002: 1-2). One of the main areas of research is re-reading of the translations of women writers and rewriting existing translations under which a set of principles guiding “feminist translation” is promoted (von Flotow 1999: 276; Simon 2000). With researches conducted under this area, it was discovered that much writing by women has never been translated at all, or existing translations have misinterpreted the author or her work (von Flotow 1997: 49). Criticisms about the English translation of Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le deuxième sexe* provide “a good example of gender-conscious translation criticism” (ibid: 49).

The analysis in my minor dissertation on the metatextual sources on Beauvoir and paratextual elements accompanying the Turkish translations of *Le deuxième sexe* has demonstrated that Simone de Beauvoir as a woman writer was promoted through the male mediators in Turkey, which led to an oversimplification and misrepresentation of her work just from the very beginning, from the front covers of the translations. This outcome made me raise questions about the translated text itself: Can we trust male readings of *Le deuxième sexe* to have provided all the philosophical analysis on women’s situation, or have they instead ignored or misread fundamental elements?

When *Le deuxième sexe* is mediated by translators insensitive to the female voice, is it likely that both text and readers suffer a significant loss?

Of relevance to my study, one of the most significant characteristics of the Turkish cultural climate before the 1980s, when the Turkish translations of *Le deuxième sexe* were published, is that feminist discourse was considered marginal, and even “women literature” and “women authors” were new concepts in Turkish literature. In such a male-dominated cultural context, a woman talking about sex and lesbian relationship was highly marginal. As stated by von Flotow, erotic writing by women is a difficult issue to transfer from one culture to another because of different target culture sensibilities and traditions in this domain (2000: 16). In this regard, were the sexual references in the Turkish translations of *Le deuxième sexe* shortened and censored, or Beauvoir’s language softened, as it was the case in the English translation (von Flotow 2000: 20)? How did the translators manage to transfer this discourse so distant to them, in terms of both culture and gender? Did the publisher exert pressure on the translator not touch the taboo subjects, or did the translator conform to some internal censor, as it was the case again with the English translation of *Le deuxième sexe* (von Flotow 2000: 15)?

In order to find answers to these questions, this study will examine the Turkish translations —produced in the 1960s and the 1970s— of *Le deuxième sexe* in terms of sexual terms and references to sexuality, compare them to the source text, make a critical discourse analysis of the texts, comment on the effect this discourse create in Turkish, and speculate on possible explanations for the changes. For a better contextualization, the paratextual features of all translations of Beauvoir’s books published in Turkey are also analyzed.

The problems in the translation of sexual terms and references are raised by issues of “cultural sensitivity” and of “gender stereotyping and cliché”, which are reinforced by the fact that Beauvoir’s translators were almost all men (von Flotow 2000: 31). In this regard, since “discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially shaped”, a critical discourse analysis of the translated texts will offer us clues about the unequal power relations between women and men in Turkey (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 258).

## *Literature Review*

One of my main sources of reference for this study is Luise von Flotow's article "Translation Effects. How Beauvoir Talks About Sex in English" in which she analyzes the English translation of Beauvoir's discourses on female sexuality referring to *The Second Sex*, *The Woman Destroyed*, *The Mandarins* and *She Came to Stay* (2000). However, in order to be able to analyze the discourse in the texts, a critical discourse analysis will be made, referring to Norman Fairclough & Ruth Wodak (1997) and Norman Fairclough (1997). Moreover, since we are dealing with a text in which gender is foregrounded, *Feminist Stylistics* by Sara Mills (1998) will be also referred to.

As already mentioned, there exist a number of articles criticizing, from a feminist perspective, the English translations of Beauvoir's work, and "seeing an ideological patriarchal motivation in the apparent censorship and distortion of the source text" (von Flotow 2000: 14). Cuts and omissions, mistranslations in the single English translation, and misrepresentations of work and author have been discussed by Margaret A. Simons (1983), Anna Alexander (1997), Toril Moi (2002), and Elizabeth Fallaize (2002). Furthermore, Anne Cordero's (1995) analysis on gender terminology in the English translation of *La femme rompue* and Terry Keefe's (1994) brief analysis of Beauvoir's 1972 interview with Alice Schwarzer reveal a manipulation of the texts by the translators.

A great part of criticisms of the American edition of *Le deuxième sexe* focuses on the unmarked deletions of more than ten percent of the original French text, destroying the continuity of the author's thought and often leading to considerable confusion (Simons 1983; Fallaize 2002; Moi 2002). Large sections dealing with women's literature and history, and especially references to lesbian relationship and social feminism, and to description of the tedious work of a housewife's day, are cut from the English edition (Simons 1983: 560-562), probably due to ideological bias according to some of Beauvoir scholars (Simons 1983; Cordero 1995; Alexander 1997; von Flotow 2000; Fallaize 2002; Moi 2002). Furthermore, the fact that the translator Howard Parshley had no training in philosophy and was not sufficiently informed on existentialism (Glazer 2004) leads to the philosophical misinterpretation of marxist and existentialist concepts in Beauvoir's work (Simons 1983: 563; Alexander 1997: 114). Another analysis on the English version has been made by von Flotow focusing on the descriptions of sexuality in the third chapter of volume two (2000). Von Flotow

concludes that mistranslations and deletions in the translation amend the discourse and produce a different text (2000: 25).

In her article “The Eclipse of Gender. Simone de Beauvoir and the *Différance* of Translation”, on the other hand, Anna Alexander problematizes the English translation focusing on the difference between the French and American contexts, and argues that Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* is a stillborn child in the American social and ideological milieu of the early 1950s, where not only “feminine existence” but philosophy was not destined for appeal (1997: 114-115).

What is then the opinion of Beauvoir on the English translation of her work? In his introduction, Parshley remarks that “modifications” in the English version “have been made with the author’s express permission” (Simons 1983: 564). But according to Deirdre Bair, Beauvoir was upset about the changes and requested from the publisher to add a statement dissociating herself from them, which was unfortunately ignored by the publisher (1987: 27-28). As for the translation errors, she was not aware of them until Margaret Simons wrote an article about it in 1983 (Simons 1983: 564).

In May 2000, Beauvoir’s adopted daughter and literary heir, Sylvie le Bon de Beauvoir, called for a new translation in a letter to Gallimard, whereupon Gallimard approached Knopf (the original hardback publishers) and Vintage (responsible for the paperback), but they declined to act on it (Glazer 2004). Knopf and Vintage are aware of the translation problems in the English text since the early 1980s with Simons’ efforts; however, they have refused to do anything (Moi 2002). In their letter to Toril Moi who requested a new, complete translation of *Le deuxième sexe*, Knopf and Vintage imply that a new translation will cost too much (ibid). Moi claims that a new scholarly edition is needed to “advance the study of Beauvoir, of feminist theory and philosophy, and of French postwar culture all over the English-speaking world” (2002).

### *Hypothesis*

The sexual terms and references to sexuality and lesbian relationship in *Le deuxième sexe* are to a great extent manipulated in the Turkish translations; they might be either censored—since lesbianism is still a taboo subject for a great part of Turkish society—or replaced by euphemisms. This kind of distortion of discourse and tendency to tone down the explicit language of the woman writer may lead us to the conclusion that the

translator may have been influenced by preconceived notions about gender. A patriarchal attitude on the part of the translator and/or publisher, and/or their concern about the receiving culture's sensibilities, and/or simply the prevailing male discourse might have changed the female voice of the text and replaced it with a patriarchal perspective.

### *Research Methodology*

This thesis starts from the premise that every translation is a process of appropriation or domestication of the original text. As Theo Hermans argues, “translators never just translate” (1999: 96), local concerns in the receiving system always produce a triggering effect on the product and the process of translation. Therefore, “the field of reception” as well as “the field of origin” plays a significant role in determining “the sense and function of a foreign work”, because “the process of transfer from a domestic field to a foreign one is made up of a series of social operations” (Bourdieu 1999: 222). In this regard, the term “translation effect” used by Luise von Flotow to refer to “the visible and verifiable changes a text undergoes in translation and the effect this has on its reception in a new culture” is crucial in the thesis (2000: 14).

Simone de Beauvoir's text in Turkish has encountered different readerships, different socio-cultural context, and inevitably different readings. Documenting the reception of an author and/or his/her work in a target culture involves analyzing the response to the author and/or his/her work in metatextual sources such as reviews, commentaries, statements, etc.; of equal importance for such research are translations of the author's work, as they are the most tangible evidence of this rewriting process of the original text. This analysis will necessarily involve looking in the target culture and contextualize the translated text and its original author, since mediators of the text will promote the text in accordance with the expectations of the target reader. The contextualization of the translation of *Le deuxième sexe*, and of the paratexts of all Turkish translations of Beauvoir's works with the aim to find answers to “who, what, when, how, why” questions will then offer clues about the ideological stance towards “woman” and “woman writing” in the receiving cultural climate.

Needless to say, the scope of this study outreaches the boundaries of the literary system, and encompasses, in a wider perspective, the social system with its cultural mediators including translators, editors, publishers, and critics. When analyzing the social system, I will refer to Bourdieu's social theory which, embracing objectivity and subjectivity, approaches the social world both from a "structuralist" perspective that attempts to uncover the objective sets of relations and forces "operating behind the backs of the agents", and a "constructivist" one that "probes the commonsense perceptions and actions of the individual" (Wacquant 2006: 6).

Since language is socially and culturally constructed, the linguistic forms which appear in texts will inevitably reflect the prevailing ideologies in a society (Fairclough 1995: 73). If we take gender relations within a society, the socially available positions for men and women in the existing structures of that society will be reflected in discourse. Therefore, a critical discourse analysis of the Turkish translations of *Le deuxième sexe*, referred to as the bible of feminist ideology, will enable me to observe the set of relations between male and female within the social system.

This analysis will then allow me to see, behind the field of cultural production, the larger field of forces which may be simply reduced to male/female opposition. This time, I will refer to Bourdieu's work on masculine domination in which he analyzes power asymmetries and domination between the sexes, arguing that —not surprisingly— in the social world, men are primarily dominant and women dominated agents (2001).

### *Research Material*

For the purpose of the study, Turkish translations of *Le deuxième sexe* and the original text in French will be used for the translation comparison and discourse analysis. As for the paratextual analysis, all translations of Beauvoir's oeuvre in Turkish will be the material.

Furthermore, I will contact the translator of the latest translation, Bertan Onaran on his translation strategy for the work. As the translators of the other translations are not alive, I can just speculate on their strategies. As for the paratextual features, I will contact the publishers and examine the publishing houses' general publication policies.

### *Expected Results*

As criticism and literature in Turkey are predominantly male, Beauvoir has been mediated by male critics, and male publishers and translators for the Turkish readership, especially before the 1980s. As my analysis on the metatextual and paratextual materials of the Turkish translation of *Le dixième sexe* has demonstrated, critics, publishers, and translators have aligned themselves along a patriarchal front that distorts the philosophical nature of the text, just from the very beginning. The clues the paratextual levels in all Turkish translations of Beauvoir's works will offer, the cultural sensitivity with references to sexuality and lesbian relationship, and the stereotypical image of woman in Turkish society make me expect that Beauvoir's discourse has been distorted in accordance with the prevailing patriarchal perspective.

### *Expected Benefits*

Even though Simone de Beauvoir's popularity in Turkey to a great extent came to her in the 1970s because of her kinship with Jean-Paul Sartre who was an idol for the Turkish intelligentsia in the 1960s, the situation has changed in the 1980s when Beauvoir was regarded as a feminist writer by the Turkish feminist circles. However, while Beauvoir's oeuvre has been extensively translated and read since the 1960s, to my knowledge, not a single monograph has been published on Beauvoir and her work. Furthermore, there is not a single critical article on the Turkish translations of any of her works. Therefore, the Turkish audience may not have been reading the "real" *Le deuxième sexe*.

The results of my analysis on the translation of terms and references to sexuality and the respective critical discourse analysis in *Le deuxième sexe* will shed light on the translation strategies of the translators and determine whether Beauvoir is talking about sex with her own female voice. This study may trigger other studies on the translations of her oeuvre and make way to new translations.

### *Transfer of Results*

The results of this study can be published in translation studies and feminist/gender studies journals. They can be also presented at conferences related to translation studies and feminist/gender studies.

I think that the members of the Simone de Beauvoir Society would be also interested in the results of this study. In her e-mail message dated 23 January 2007, Yolanda Patterson, Professor Emerita of French and Women's Studies California State University and a member of International Simone de Beauvoir Society, told me that she would like to mention my research on the Turkish translations of Beauvoir's work in the Spring 2007 newsletter under "Work in Progress".

### *Financial Needs and Resources*

This project is self-financed.

### *Work Schedule*

The following schedule summarizes the work done so far and the plan for the next year.

Year 2006-2007

- Data compilation
- Data selection
- Literature review

Year 2007-2008

- Data analysis
- Final draft

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